

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Friday, July 6, 2007

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Article published Jul 6, 2007

OUR OPINIONS

Web site offers help for youth 'aging out' of foster system

Few of us can imagine what it would be like to turn 18 years old and suddenly be totally on our own - no parents or grandparents, no place to call home.

But that is exactly the situation in which hundreds of Michigan young people find themselves each year as they "age out" of the foster-care system. They no longer have a legal guardian and often must fend for themselves when it comes to money, food and shelter.

Now the Michigan Department of Human Services has launched a new Web site to provide some guidance and support for former foster youths. By logging on to www.michigan.gov/fyit, they can find a wide array of helpful information.

The Foster Youth in Transition Web site helps young people to "TCB (take care of business" with information on education, employment, housing, finances, transportation and legal services; "TCY (take care of you)" with facts on health/wellness, substance abuse, mental health, pregnancy, parenting and disabilities; and "FYI (for your information)" offering tips on social life, things to do, relationships, volunteering and foster youth alumni.

While the Web site is not a perfect substitute for a home and family support, it at least provides guidance in helping former foster youths to navigate their future and helps them to connect with resources and others who have been in the same position in which they now find themselves.

Undoubtedly there is a real need for the Web site and the information it contains. Last year, 536 young people in Michigan left foster care. Research indicates that they are at greater risk than their peers of being poor, homeless and unemployed.

The Web site will be maintained by members of 30 county youth boards across the state, created as part of the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative.

It is vital that www.michigan.gov/fyit continue and that word about what it has to offer spreads to all foster youths who will someday face the prospect of "aging out" and will need all the help they can get to build a successful future.



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Published July 6, 2007

LSJ blogs

Upscale more touchy?
Which state employees are more likely to complain about the State Journal's publication of state payroll data - those at the top of the scale, or those at the bottom?

Check out my blog at www.lsj.com/schneiderblog

Schneider: Readers thankful someone helped elderly fraud victim

The elderly fraud victim I wrote about last week is now under the supervision of Eaton County Adult Protective Services, according to Eaton County Sheriff Mike Raines.

However, it may be too late for her bank account.

On Thursday, I phoned the woman's Dimondale home and reached a younger woman who, though acknowledging that she is a friend of the woman, declined to tell me her name, or speak to me in any detail.

"I shouldn't be talking to you at all," she said.

She did say that the \$1,400 mentioned in my June 28 column was "pocket change" compared to the money the woman had wired to Jamaica in recent months. She also said that the stranger's intervention was "absolutely a good thing," and confirmed that Adult Protective Services was involved.

As I wrote in the original column, I heard last week from a reader named Lynn who observed the elderly woman at the West Saginaw Highway Meijer buying \$1,400 worth of money orders bound for Jamaica.

Suspecting a case of financial exploitation, Lynn, as you may recall, said she tried to get the Meijer clerks to intervene. They argued, however, that a customer's financial transaction was none of their business.

Lynn told me that she then looked over the elderly woman's shoulder and got her name, address and phone number. Then she called me.

Good intentions

As I wrote in the original column, I had a feeling that the caller may, in fact, have been a Meijer clerk with a conscience AND a desire to remain employed, but that was just a hunch.

I relayed the information to Sheriff Raines, who called the woman's home, spoke to her caretaker,

and determined that the money was not going to Jamaica for legitimate reasons.

Obviously, the intervening stranger's heart was in the right place, but the idea of a casual observer looking over somebody's shoulder to get personal information presented a troubling image.

But virtually all the readers who responded to the column thought the ends justified the means. A sample:

Getting involved

- From Kay Schmidtmann of DeWitt: "My aunt and uncle, who have dementia, were scammed in Florida this same way. I wish someone would have intervened on behalf of my aunt and uncle."
- From Stephen Fuller of Haslett: "I have to come down on the side of Lynn. She saw something that triggered too many red flags. ... I'm surprised the people at Meijer didn't do something about it."
- From Sandra Chavez of Owosso: "Lynn is just the type of person I hope my mother meets in her daily activities. We all need to keep an eye on our elders."
- From David Foreman of Williamston: "Privacy is important, but we must use our basic human sense of right from wrong to protect our fellow citizens from crimes."
- From Darlys Cowan of St. Johns: "It takes a village to raise a child, and it also takes a village to care for our elderly. If this were my grandmother, I would be extremely grateful to Lynn for being a part of the village."
- From Lauri Miller of Grand Ledge: "I think what Lynn did was great. More people should get involved, rather than looking the other way. Maybe the world would start getting back to the way it used to be - people caring for each other."
- From Nicole Babb of Lansing: "Just in case no one else has told you this yet, the clerks at Meijer are required to report the suspicious activity using a Suspicious Activity Report. As a business that has 'money services' such as Western Union, they should know this. I believe this is a requirement of the Patriot Act to prevent money laundering and other activities."
- From Josh Ard of Williamston: "I disagree strongly that the nature of the transaction was not the store's business. It IS their business to help ensure that customers find their stores a hospitable, helpful place to shop and that their customers have the resources to continue to shop there."

What do you think? Call John Schneider at 377-1175, send a fax to 377-1298 or e-mail jschneid@lsj.com.

Include your name, phone number, city, town or township.

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Police: Man sold pot with ice cream treats

BENTON TOWNSHIP (AP) — Southwestern Michigan authorities say tips led to the arrest of an ice cream truck operator who was selling marijuana along with his frozen desserts.

After authorities got tips about the pot-peddler, a deputy “heard jingling bells” about 2 p.m. Thursday and saw the ice cream truck entering a mobile home park, Berrien County sheriff’s Lt. Keith Hafer said in a written statement.

The park is in Benton Township, about 70 miles southwest of Grand Rapids.

Deputy John Hopkins stopped the truck, spoke with the driver and “detected the odor of marijuana coming from the truck (along with tutti-frutti and a couple other flavors),” Hafer wrote.

Authorities searched the van and found several packages of marijuana under the dashboard, the statement said.

The 36-year-old suspect was jailed while awaiting arraignment on charges of marijuana possession with intent to deliver and maintaining a drug vehicle, and on an outstanding warrant for skipping child support, Hafer said.

Authorities later released the vehicle to the vending company “in spite of an effort by Narcotics Officers to devise a way to forfeit the vehicle and its icy cold treats,” Hafer said. He said police would seek revocation of the company’s license to operate in Benton Township.

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Article published Jul 5, 2007

Residents believe in importance of quality day care

By Pam Fleming
RECORD STAFF WRITER

Gail Torreano and Colleen Sweeney believe in the power of women.

As such, for years the two Northville residents have supported the Women's Caring Program's fund-raiser that helps needy families pay for child care.

Torreano, of Northville Township, president of AT&T Michigan, has, through her company, donated \$2,500 to the program each year.

The company has also purchased tickets for many of its employees who might not be able to afford a ticket.

"I try to gather women who would benefit from the networking opportunities," Torreano said.

Torreano said women across the state look forward to the event each year, and she tips her hat to organizers.

"This group of women have identified a need and have consistently raised money," she said. "I think they were on the cutting edge when they started it. It's clearly a great cause."

Torreano said the event offers women a chance to network with leaders and community activists throughout Michigan and at the same time fill a need not being met by any other organization.

"As a company, we care about education, including early childhood education, and that's what good day care should provide," she said.

"Having good day care is so crucial," Torreano said. "If you don't have that, you're not going to be able to be successful. You've got to feel confident that your children are being well cared for."

Livonia teacher involved

Sweeney, who teaches special needs children in Livonia and has worked as a substitute teacher for Northville schools, became involved in the program about four years ago.

She was "drafted" into the program since her sister, Maureen Saxton, is a member of the Women's Caring Program board of directors.

She has attended the fund-raiser for several years and worked the registration tent for the last two years.

"The grounds are incredibly beautiful, and the fund-raiser is held in huge tents on the grounds," Sweeney said. "It's a truly elegant outdoor event."

Sweeney said the food is outstanding as are the networking opportunities.

"These are high-powered women at this event," she said.

Although she and her husband were fortunate enough to be able to afford day care in a licensed facility with a low ratio of day care providers to child when their children were young, she knows not all families can.

"This is very important," she said. "If you don't provide the type of stimulating environment for children from birth to age 6, it has a big affect on them."

The program provides up to 40 percent of child care expenses for one child for one year.

"There is no other organization that focuses just on that," Sweeney said. "It started out with a small network of women, and it's just grown."

Sweeney said one family was helped by the program when the mother wanted to go back to school for a year.

She wanted to earn her nursing degree but couldn't because she would have to quit her job to do so, knocking out the family's ability to pay for day care.

Through the ChildCare Commitment program, the family was able to help pay for day care so the woman could obtain her nursing degree, boosting the family's income considerably.

"This program helps alleviate some of the stress and hardship these families are under," Sweeney said.

Pam Fleming is a staff writer for the Northville Record. She can be reached at (248) 349-1700, ext. 105, or at pfleming@gannett.com.

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Article published Jul 6, 2007

Couple thrive close to water

By Jim Totten

DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

They met as graduate students in the vast, pristine Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada, which is dotted with lakes and forests. They fell in love and later married.

Some 20 years later, Liz and David Larwa purchased the dream home that keeps them connected to water. It's perched upon a secluded hill that overlooks Winans Lake in Hamburg Township in southeastern Livingston County. There's a wetlands behind them, and snapping turtles often stroll through their yard going from the wetlands to the lake.

"It called me," Liz Larwa said about the contemporary home in which almost every room has a view of the lake. "It was supposed to be my house."

The nature-loving couple has transformed the outside into a garden oasis that will be featured in the prestigious LACASA Garden Tour on the weekend of July 14-15.

LACASA provides assistance to victims of domestic violence, child abuse and sexual assault services to victims and their families and friends.

The Larwa garden features stone walls, daffodils, forsythia, daylilies, wild phlox as well as stewartia, herbs and potatoes.

Although they've been creating their gardens for years, they made huge improvements because they held a garden wedding for their daughter at their home last year.

Although Liz Larwa's mother was a huge gardener, she admits it's her husband who has developed a burning passion for gardening.

"It's a joint effort, but he'll say he does a lot more work — which is true," she said.

Not only has he created gardens and stone walls, David Larwa created a nature trail on the property and is a beekeeper.

"I don't golf," he explained.

A consultant for educational publications, he travels a lot and looks forward to the time he spends at home.

"When you get home, it's nice to get your hands dirty with the soil," he said.

Liz Larwa, a science teacher at Spencer Elementary School, enjoys ikebana, which is Japanese style of arranging flowers. It uses fewer flowers and only those in season.

She said maintaining their garden is a challenge because they don't have a sprinkler system.

"We drag hoses everywhere," she said.

Another challenge is keeping animals — specifically deer — from eating their plants. They don't plant tulips because deer love to eat them; instead they've installed little devices that contain animal blood, which act as a repellent for deer.

David Larwa said one the best things was receiving good advice early on. He learned from a friend how to build a stone wall and properly plant a tree, as well as basic plants and bushes for starting off a garden. The couple acquired their own knowledge of plants by talking to local nurseries and asking lots of questions.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Jim Totten at (517) 548-7088 or at jtotten@gannett.com.



Adults with disabilities gain skills, do volunteer work in new program

July 6, 2007

BY GINA DAMRON

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A new community-based center for adults with mental disabilities has opened in Rochester, teaching life skills and giving its members a chance to get out and volunteer in the city.

Starting Point, which opened in June, is for adults ages 26 and older who aren't capable of working regular jobs. The center's workers coach them on skills such as cooking, doing laundry, cleaning and recycling. The members also volunteer in the community; recently they helped an animal welfare group wash and walk dogs.

Gina Dettloff, Starting Point program director, said she doesn't believe Oakland County has another program like it. Its members can come to the center every weekday and get out into the city.

"There really is nothing like this, where you're out in the community ... the community you were raised in," Dettloff said.

Starting Point is a privately run program funded through Medicaid.

For Rochester resident Sheryl Garwood -- one of a group of parents who organized and made the program happen -- the center is just what her daughter, Emily, needs.

Emily, who lives with her parents, is 28 and living with cri du chat syndrome, a condition that affects her mental, physical and verbal abilities. After high school, Garwood said her daughter was involved in a public school-related program from the ages of 18 to 26, but she aged out of that program.

Garwood said she couldn't find any other comparable programs in the area.

Adults with disabilities "could sit home and do nothing and parents who work would have to, who knows what, quit their jobs or whatever," she said. "They have been included in the community and schools since elementary grades. So, all of a sudden now to say we're done with you and you're going to sit home, it was just ludicrous."

Along came the idea for Starting Point.

The center now has 10 clients, but has room for 20, Dettloff said.

Sheryl Garwood said it was important for her to keep Emily close to home because it's an area her daughter is familiar and comfortable with. It's also easier for Garwood, a second-grade teacher with Warren Consolidated Schools, to pick up and drop off Emily on workdays.

Plus, her daughter gets to make friends and be social.

"She thrives on being around people," Garwood said.

Emily Garwood will never live by herself, but the center is helping her become more independent and is reinforcing all she has learned, her mother said.

"All that Emily had gained in all the years she would have lost by having to sit at home," Garwood said. The center is teaching her things like "hanging your coat up, putting things in the fridge, throwing things away."

"Just day-to-day life skills."

Friday, July 06, 2007

Scientist's lab work probed State weighs legality of using forensics lab to test spouse's underwear for DNA of another woman.

Kathy Barks Hoffman / Associated Press

LANSING -- A state forensics scientist who said she tested her husband's underwear for DNA to find out if he was having sex with another woman is being investigated to determine if she violated policies banning the use of state equipment for personal reasons.

Ann Chamberlain-Gordon of Okemos testified in a March 7 divorce hearing that she ran the test last September on the underwear of Charles Gordon Jr. Asked by his attorney what she found, she answered, "Another female. It wasn't me."

She also said during a May 25 hearing in Ingham County Family Court that she ran the test on her own time with expired chemicals that were set to be thrown away.

The Michigan State Police, which oversees the Lansing forensics laboratory where Chamberlain-Gordon works, is conducting an internal investigation. It expects to decide by next week if disciplinary action should be taken.

"We don't know exactly what was or wasn't done," State Police spokeswoman Shanon Akans said Tuesday. "We haven't completed our investigation."

A request for comment was left Tuesday with Chamberlain-Gordon. She has not had her duties restricted during the investigation, Akans said.

The DNA test came to light after Charles Gordon's Lansing attorney, Michael Maddaloni, sent a letter to the State Police and some media outlets questioning how many times DNA tests have been improperly run.

Maddaloni said Tuesday that Gordon -- who court records show was a former Canadian Football League player -- disputed his wife's testimony that he acknowledged a sexual encounter with another woman after she found the female DNA on his underwear.

Gordon, a defensive back, played with the CFL from the early 1990s through 1997.

Chamberlain-Gordon received the inaugural award for Outstanding Contribution to the Michigan State Police Biological Services in 2006 for her research and method development in embryonic/fetal DNA recovery, according to Forensic Science Consultants Inc., which lists her among the forensic scientists it employs.

According to information on the Williamston company's Web site, Chamberlain-Gordon has worked for the State Police as a forensic scientist since 1999 and was interim supervisor of the biology unit in 2005. She has given expert witness testimony in more than 50 cases, including in **last year's trial involving the death of 7-year-old Ricky Holland.**

State Police policies dealing with the care and use of property state that "department supplies, materials or equipment shall not be used for any non-duty or non-department purpose."

Akans said she didn't know yet whether Chamberlain-Gordon had used state equipment. She added that State Police managers think they have strong policies in place to keep forensic labs secure, but said changes might be made once the investigation into Chamberlain-Gordon is complete.

"The integrity of the lab means so much," she said. "We'll be looking at that and seeing if there aren't places to strengthen."

MORNING SUN

Governor: More money needed to end state fiscal jam

By MARK RANZENBERGER
Sun Staff Writer

Gov. Jennifer Granholm said Tuesday that the state will need more money and will have to find more ways to reduce costs if it is to get out of its fiscal jam.

"People have to know it is the right thing for Michigan," Granholm told members of the Morning Sun editorial board. "Everybody's got to give in and come to the center."

She also visited newspapers in Bay City and Saginaw on Tuesday, and broadcast a brief, statewide television message Tuesday evening.

Granholm said the state is part way out of the woods after lawmakers passed a replacement business tax based largely on gross receipts as a replacement for the Michigan single business tax. But she said that fixing the state's long-term problems will take political will, and that there is no other choice.

"Is there the political will to slash public education?" she asked.

She called on lawmakers to reduce their own salaries by 5 percent. She said she has voluntarily given back that amount of her pay for the past few years, and called on legislators to do the same thing.

Granholm said during contract negotiations with state civil servants, workers agreed to \$300 million worth of concessions. She said when contracts are up next year, she will ask for more.

But, she said, the state probably won't reduce its work force further.

"We already are in the bottom 10 states in terms of state employees per capita," she said.

Granholm said spending reductions could come from creation of regional health insurance pools for public employees, including public school employees. She also repeated her call to reduce prison populations by assigning some non-violent offenders to community-based programs.

She said revenue could come from extending the sales tax, probably to what she termed "high-end services," or increasing the state income tax.

"We could take the income tax back up to where it was a couple of years ago," Granholm said. The income tax rate has fallen from 4.6 percent to its current 3.9 percent.

"Since 1999, we've lost \$2 billion in revenue," she said.

Granholt admitted that the changes wouldn't be easy for lawmakers, because votes for any of them could lead to negative campaign-commercial sound bites.

"How do you get past the 'raised taxes' or 'cut teachers' benefits'?" Granholt said.

Granholt said the new business tax would provide a more understandable and more predictable basis for taxing business. She said that even though banks, insurance companies and out-of-state companies would end up paying more, "they're not thrilled, but they're not unhappy."

She said nearly three-fourths of Michigan businesses would end up paying less under the new taxation plan. Granholt said it provides tax relief for manufacturers and encourages job creation.

"The more people you hire," she said, "the lower your tax burden."

Granholt said Michigan is in a unique position to exploit the creation of alternative energy. She said automotive research and development continues to be centered on the state, and Michigan State University is leading research into development of ethanol fuel from cellulose sources, such as wood and switchgrass, instead of from grain.

Granholt noted that Hemlock Semiconductor, the mid-Michigan-based joint venture of Dow Corning, Shin-Etsu Chemical Co. and Mitsubishi Materials, has just announced the investment of \$1.2 billion in manufacturing facilities for solar panels.

"It's a natural niche for us," she said.

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